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Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1311 (2000) of 28 July 2000, by which the Council decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) until 31 January 2001 and requested me to report to it three months from the date of the adoption of the resolution. It provides an update on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, since my report of 17 July 2000 (S/2000/697).

2. The Mission continues to be headed by my Special Representative for Georgia, Dieter Boden, who is assisted in this task by the Chief Military Observer, Major General Anis Ahmed Bajwa (Pakistan). The strength of UNOMIG, as at 16 October 2000, stood at 103 military observers (see annex).

II. Political aspects

3. On 5 September 2000, I met with the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, who had travelled to United Nations Headquarters in connection with the Millennium Summit. We discussed issues related to the comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.

4. During the reporting period, my Special Representative, in cooperation with the Russian Federation as facilitator, the members of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General for Georgia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), continued his efforts to move the peace process forward, at the same time addressing the issue of the future constitutional status of Abkhazia, the improvement of the security situation, the return of refugees, economic rehabilitation and confidence-building measures. The period was characterized by a series of bilateral consultations chaired by my Special Representative on key aspects of the political settlement, confidence-building contacts between the two sides in a variety of fields and concrete steps to reinvigorate the machinery of the Coordinating Council mechanism, including the Council's three working groups. This included the revival of Working Group I on security issues, which convened twice during the reporting period, as well as separate visits to Sukhumi by the heads of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme in Georgia, in their capacity as coordinators of Working Group II on refugees and internally displaced persons, and of Working Group III on social and economic questions, respectively, for consultations with the Abkhaz side. Efforts of the Friends of the Secretary-General, including visits by my Special Representative to capitals, to arrive at a coordinated draft document addressing basic principles for the distribution of competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi (see S/2000/697, para. 5) have not yet succeeded.

5. On 6 and 7 August 2000 in Tbilisi, and again on 20 August in Sukhumi, my Special Representative chaired consultations between the Georgian Minister for Special Affairs, Malkhaz Kakabadze and Anri Jergenia, the personal representative of Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba, on the basis of the Protocol signed on 11 July 2000 at the tenth session of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz

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sides in Sukhumi (see S/2000/697, para. 8). The Protocol called upon the two sides to finalize the draft Protocol on the return of refugees to the Gali district and measures for economic rehabilitation and the draft Agreement on peace and guarantees for the prevention of hostilities. Although the Georgian side put forward new versions of both draft documents, which have been on the negotiating table in some form since June 1998, disagreement between the two sides persisted. The consultations also included broader discussions of central aspects of a comprehensive political settlement. During the visit to Tblisi, President Shevardnadze received Mr. Jergenia and both sides gave assurances of their commitment to resolve the outstanding issues constructively and exclusively through peaceful means.

6. On the basis of the Protocol, both sides submitted to my Special Representative proposals concerning further work in the field of confidence-building measures, with a view to preparing for the third Meeting on Confidence-building Measures to be convened in Yalta at the end of November 2000, at the invitation of the Government of Ukraine.

7. Meanwhile, my Special Representative and UNOMIG continue to provide good offices and substantial logistical support for a wide array of concrete cooperation projects between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides. During the September 2000 visit to Tbilisi by the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Government of Georgia agreed to a request by the Abkhaz side that UNESCO consider funding the renovation of cultural monuments located in Abkhazia. On 28 and 29 September in Sukhumi, the United Nations facilitated the first contact between Georgian and Abkhaz technical experts, who met with their Russian colleagues to seek a solution to the problem of safe storage of the radioactive materials currently located at the Physico-technical Institute in Sukhumi. On 5 and 6 October 2000, on the basis of a long-standing agreement between the two sides, a delegation from the European Commission visited the Inguri power station and dam to concretize plans for their repair. In a continuation of a project begun during the last reporting period (see S/2000/697, para. 9), the Director of the Georgian National Library, Levan Berdzenishvili, gathered further materials to present to the Abkhaz side. On the basis of an agreement between the leaders of the two sides, the third round of restoration of films shot at various times during the last century in Abkhazia was completed, with financing by the Government of Germany. Many of these projects were also facilitated by the Georgian/Abkhaz Coordination Commission and its Executive Secretary, Zurab Lakerbaia.

8. On 22 September 2000, the respective ministers of education of the two sides met in Sukhumi to discuss plans for cooperation in improving education in the Gali district and resolving the matter of the language of education used in schools. On 9 October 2000, the Abkhaz de facto Minister of Health travelled to Tbilisi and met her counterpart to discuss potential collaboration; they were received by President Shevardnadze.

III. Operations of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia

9. The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia continues to perform its mandate by means of daily ground patrols originating from mission headquarters in Sukhumi and the two sector headquarters in Gali and Zugdidi, as well as through frequent helicopter patrols. In this way, UNOMIG military observers are able to cover regularly the entire area of responsibility of the Mission, with the exception of the Georgian-controlled upper part of the Kodori Valley, which was only accessed twice by mission personnel during the reporting period.

10. After extensive consultations in the aftermath of the October 1999 and June 2000 hostage-taking incidents in the upper Kodori Valley, the Government of Georgia assured UNOMIG in early August that the necessary security conditions now existed to resume helicopter patrolling of the valley. In order to assess the situation, the Chief Military Observer led a helicopter patrol to the upper part of the valley on 12 and 13 August and, together with Georgian Minister of Defence David Tevzadze, attended the inauguration of the new head of administration in the area. In meetings with UNOMIG on that occasion, the local population welcomed the prospect of a renewed UNOMIG presence in the valley. A further patrol was carried out on 19 September and there are plans to visit the area initially at least once a month.

11. This positive development in the Kodori Valley took place as the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) prepares

to open a new checkpoint on the ceasefire line between the upper Kodori Valley and the Abkhaz-controlled lower part, another development which should enhance general security in the area and improve freedom of movement for UNOMIG patrols. It is hoped that the checkpoint may also become the venue for regular meetings between representatives of the upper Kodori Valley, the Abkhaz side, UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force.

12. On 20 August in Sukhumi and on 4 October in Tbilisi, the Chief Military Observer chaired sessions of Working Group I of the Coordinating Council dealing with security issues, with the participation of representatives of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides and of the CIS peacekeeping force. The sessions focused on the implementation of the specific security agreements listed in the Protocol to the 3 May 2000 high-level meeting in Gali (see S/2000/697, paras. 7 and 8) and on improving the functioning and efficacy of the Joint Fact-finding Group. Among the measures discussed, and later carried out on the ground, were the verification by UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force of the strength of the respective security personnel of the two sides in the security zone and the establishment of better communications between the heads of Georgian and Abkhaz law enforcement agencies in the security zone.

13. Although attendance became sporadic, the Joint Fact-finding Group continued to convene on a weekly basis throughout the reporting period, despite rising frustration on all sides with the lack of progress on specific cases.

14. In a ceremony held on 22 September, my Special Representative and Abkhaz de facto Prime Minister Viacheslav Tsugba officially opened a bridge located along the main trunk road through the conflict zone, which had been renovated as part of the UNOMIG engineering programme in support of the Mission's patrolling tasks. A number of road surface repairs and road reconstruction projects were also completed during the reporting period, and projects in the Kodori Valley and on the road leading to the Inguri hydro-electric power station are under way.

IV. Situation on the ground

15. The general situation in the zone of conflict remained calm but unstable during the reporting period. Some improvement in the security climate may be attributed in part to the reactivation of Working Group I within the framework of the Coordinating Council (see para. 12 above), and the increasing cooperation of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides in implementing agreements reached within that format. In the Gali sector, the usual summer lull in partisan and criminal activity has been particularly noticeable in 2000. However, the undercurrent of endemic lawlessness continued, and the hazelnut harvest was the trigger for a sudden rise in armed robberies, primarily in the Gali security zone. Many of these robberies appear to be organized actions carried out with the tacit acceptance of some local officials. Fourteen people were killed and 22 injured in ambushes and shootings during the harvest season. In an attempt to improve the security climate, the Abkhaz administration of the Gali district increased militia patrolling and formed additional village guards. In addition, the CIS peacekeeping force introduced daily armoured patrols, as had often been suggested by UNOMIG, to provide security and escort local residents bringing large quantities of hazelnuts to collection points. While these initiatives had some positive impact, they could not address the underlying reasons for the general climate of insecurity.

16. At the peak of the hazelnut harvest season, tens of thousands of spontaneous returnees to the Gali district were in full-time residence in the area despite precarious security and living conditions. The start of the academic year in September usually brings migrants, primarily women and children, back across the ceasefire line to the Zugdidi area; the magnitude of this migration in 2000 will depend on the extent to which Gali district schools are able to find the resources to open, and on whether the Abkhaz side musters the requisite political will to resolve the problem of the language of education in the schools.

17. In the Zugdidi sector, the appearance of several notorious figures from the criminal and rebel underworlds gave rise to concern at the overall political and security climate in which UNOMIG is operating. On 12 September 2000, Georgian police in Zugdidi arrested Dato Shengelia, the leader of a partisan group (the so-called "Forest Brothers") and a reputed organized crime figure in the zone of conflict. The arrest may be related to agreements reached by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides within the framework of the Coordinating Council to combat crime in the

security zone. Meanwhile, Badri Zarandia, a leader of the group that took UNOMIG members hostage in Zugdidi in February 1998, resurfaced and made threatening demands to the Government of Georgia for the release from prison of some of his allies.

18. In July, Georgian police conducted an operation against Colonel Akaki Eliava in western Georgia. Colonel Eliava, who had remained at large after staging an unsuccessful armed mutiny against the Government of Georgia in October 1998, was killed during the action. After his death, his supporters publicly threatened to abduct UNOMIG personnel in order to pressure the Government of Georgia to release other members of Eliava's group. On the advice of Minister of Internal Affairs Kakha Targamadze, UNOMIG suspended operations in the Zugdidi area for a few days until the tension was defused.

V. Security situation

19. The security and safety of UNOMIG personnel remain the highest priority for the Mission. During the reporting period, a number of robberies occurred in the living quarters of UNOMIG local and international staff, particularly in the Zugdidi area. Generally, the security situation remains sufficiently under control for UNOMIG to carry out its mandate satisfactorily, but not to the extent that the security measures instituted in May 1998 can be lifted.

VI. Cooperation with the collective peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States

20. Cooperation between UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force remains close. It includes, most importantly, security back-up on the ground by the peacekeeping force, as well as active collaboration in the context of the weekly quadripartite meetings and in Working Group I on security issues. As mentioned earlier, the CIS peacekeeping force responded favourably to encouragement by UNOMIG to increase its patrolling of the Gali security zone during the harvest season, in order to improve the security situation in the region.

VII. Humanitarian situation and human rights

21. During the reporting period, the humanitarian situation in Abkhazia, Georgia remained unsatisfactory, with large segments of the population depending on humanitarian assistance for their well-being, while facing serious problems of food security, accommodation and shelter, sanitation and access to health care. The continued deterioration of the infrastructure and the lack of economic development exacerbate the problems, as does the precarious security situation.

22. Humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations continue to provide vital assistance to the vulnerable population of Abkhazia, Georgia. Halo Trust continues to expand its mine-clearing operations, and its mine-awareness training. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and *Acción contra el Hambre* (ACH) continue to address the issue of food security through their canteens and food distribution programmes. In addition, ICRC has several programmes addressing needs in the health-care sector. ACH has begun to develop some transitional assistance programmes by providing limited agricultural inputs. *Première Urgence* has resumed its operations and intends to rehabilitate the accommodations of vulnerable segments of the population. *Médecins sans Frontières*-France (MSF) continues its tuberculosis programme and plans to expand it to the prisons. In addition, MSF continues to provide medical assistance through mobile teams. It should be noted that parts of the Gali district and the Kodori Valley have received little or no humanitarian assistance in the reporting period, owing to perceived mine and security threats.

23. At the request of my Special Representative, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) carried out consultations with the Georgian and Abkhaz sides to explore the possibility of reanimating Working Group II on refugees and internally displaced persons, within the framework of the Coordinating Council. In September, UNHCR conducted a preliminary assessment of needs among spontaneous returnees to the Gali district, and concluded that a limited resumption of protection monitoring has now become necessary in view of the size of the returnee population. UNHCR remains ready to provide such reintegration assistance, provided that

the Abkhaz and Georgian sides agree on tangible measures to improve the security situation and that the necessary donor support is forthcoming.

24. During the reporting period, the United Nations Human Rights Office in Sukhumi, although still understaffed, increased its activities. It continued to provide advisory services to the local population, encourage the development of non-governmental organizations and to monitor places of detention in Abkhazia, Georgia. In August, the office published Abkhaz language translations of two United Nations fact sheets, entitled "Discrimination against women: the Convention and the Committee" and "Methods of combating torture". Efforts to obtain the Abkhaz side's consent to the opening of a branch of the human rights office in Gali continue. Such a step would have to be integrated into the overall United Nations-led peace process and would require an improved environment. I have discussed prospects of the strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE in the field of promotion of human rights, in particular in Abkhazia, Georgia, with the Chairperson-in-Office of OSCE on 11 September 2000.

25. On 15 August, Zurab Achba, a legal assistant to the human rights office, was shot and killed in Sukhumi. Mr. Achba was widely known and respected, both for his professionalism in the field of jurisprudence and his personal commitment to the cause of protection and promotion of human rights. My Special Representative has received the commitment of the Abkhaz side to keep UNOMIG fully informed about the course of the investigation in this crime, although these assurances have not been fully kept.

VIII. Social and economic aspects

26. The low level of rainfall in eastern Georgia during the spring and summer of 2000 has negatively affected the wheat and sunflower harvests. In response to an appeal by President Shevardnadze, a joint mission of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme visited the area in early August and concluded that the 2000 cereal production was 44 per cent below the average of the past five years. As a result, food aid to the most affected population in six regions of eastern Georgia — some 700,000 persons — will be required for eight months, at an approximate cost of $50 million. In addition, the Mission noted that subsistence farmers will not have the capacity to purchase the winter wheat seeds and related agricultural inputs, diesel fuel, pesticide and fertilizers required for the next planting season, the cost of which is estimated at some $15 million.

IX. Observations

27. It is encouraging that the two sides, with direct support from President Shevardnadze and Mr. Ardzinba, have demonstrated a willingness to engage, in a restricted format under the chairmanship of my Special Representative, in detailed talks on key aspects of a political settlement. However, the lack of progress so far on the critical issue of defining the status of Abkhazia within the state of Georgia is deeply regrettable. I appeal to both sides, and particularly to the Abkhaz side, to undertake immediate efforts to move beyond this impasse. Negotiations on the draft paper on basic principles for the distribution of competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi, which will be presented to the parties by my Special Representative and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General, must be the next step. In this context, it is imperative that the members of the group of Friends seek and reach as soon as possible a shared position on the draft paper which takes into account the Security Council's view that any solution to the conflict has to be based on the territorial integrity of Georgia.

28. The late summer harvest season brought with it what appears to be the largest spontaneous return of population to the Gali district since the end of the war in 1993. It is disturbing that this substantial de facto returnee population continues to live in an undefined and insecure state, and that it should continue to endure daily social and economic hardship, insufficient protection of its human rights and a continuing lack of appropriate representation in local administrative structures. The two sides should treat the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, first of all to the Gali district, as a matter of the most urgent humanitarian concern, engage in genuine negotiations with each other to resolve concrete aspects of the matter and not link this issue to other political matters.

29. The increasing vitality of the Coordinating Council mechanism as the central element of the Geneva peace process is commendable. I am pleased to see the active rejuvenation of Working Group I on

security issues and I call upon both sides to cooperate with my Special Representative in his efforts to revive Working Groups II and III as well. Close integration of the Working Groups with the Council itself, wherein the Groups convene regularly and make proposals for possible adoption at a higher level by the Council, would be constructive and would broaden the political base on which to build a comprehensive political solution.

30. I welcome the readiness expressed by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides to accept the invitation by the Government of Ukraine to the third Meeting on Confidence-building Measures, to be held in Yalta in late November. The meeting is intended to establish and build contacts between the sides in various fields and to foster the public climate necessary for an eventual settlement of the conflict. Both sides should prepare actively for the event and be ready to take decisions that will improve confidence and contribute to the overall peace effort.

31. I take this opportunity to remind both sides that the provision of security, for the local population and for UNOMIG, is primarily their responsibility. They should, as a minimum, implement those measures that were agreed upon within the framework of the Coordinating Council, and in particular cooperate in combating crime and improving the work of their respective law enforcement agencies. They should also work closely with UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force to improve the functioning of the Joint Fact-finding Group, so that it may make a real contribution to the improvement of security conditions in the zone of conflict.

32. The recent assurances by the Government of Georgia that it will provide proper security conditions in the Kodori Valley so that UNOMIG may carry out its mandate are most welcome. It is still necessary that the perpetrators of the October 1999 and June 2000 hostage-taking incidents in the Kodori Valley be brought to justice.

33. In conclusion, I commend the leadership and the men and women of UNOMIG for their dedication and professionalism in carrying their duties in difficult and, at times, dangerous circumstances.

Annex

United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia: contributions as at 16 October 2000

Country	*Military observers*
Albania	1
Austria	5
Bangladesh	7
Czech Republic	5
Denmark	5
Egypt	3
France	3
Germany	10
Greece	4
Hungary	7
Indonesia	4
Jordan	6
Pakistan	7*
Poland	4
Republic of Korea	3
Russian Federation	3
Sweden	5
Switzerland	4
Turkey	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	7
Uruguay	3
United States of America	2
Total	**103**

* Including the Chief Military Observer.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
UNOMIG DEPLOYMENT
DÉPLOIEMENT DE LA MONUG
РАЗВЕРТЫВАНИЕ МООННГ
DESPLIEGUE DE LA UNOMIG
RUSSIAN FEDERATION
Caucasus Mountains
Gantiadi
Gagra
Pitsunda
Gudauta
Novyy Afon
Sukhumi
Gulripsh
Dranda
Pskhu
Kyemo Azhara
Omarishara
Amtkel
Lata
Otap
Tqvarchal
Mesira
Khashi
Okumi
Ochamchira
Tsalenjikha
Zemo Bargevi
Gali
Nabakevi
Pichori
Anaklia
Zugdidi
Kahati
Khobi
Senaki
Tskhaltubo
Poti
Samtredia
Kutaisi
Lentekhi
Khvanchkara
Kvaisi
Ambrolauri
Tqibuli
Mleta
Passanauri
Chiatura
Kurta
Tskhinvali
Akhalgori
Zestaponi
Supsa
Chokhatauri
Khashuri
Gori
Dusheti
Ozurgeti
Kobuleti
Bakhmaro
Borjomi
Mtskheta
Tbilisi
Batumi
Khulo
Akhaltsikhe
Vale
Marneuli
TURKEY
Mission HQ
Sector HQ
Sector HQ
Liaison office
Team base (closed)
Security zone (SZ)
Restricted weapons zone (RWZ)